DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 231 817 SP 022 714

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TITLE Restructuring Careers in Teaching. Issuegram 41.
INSTITUTION Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colo.
PUB DATE 15 Apr 83
NOTE 10p.
AVAILABLE FROM Distribution Center, Education Commission of the States, 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, CO 80295.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Development; *Career Ladders; Developmental Stages; Differentiated Staffs; Elementary Secondary Education; Incentives; Inservice Teacher Education; Master Teachers; Teacher Employment; *Teacher Evaluation; *Teacher Promotion; *Teaching (Occupation); *Teaching Experience

ABSTRACT

One approach to raising the appeal of the teaching profession ties diagnostic evaluations to promotions and creates a career ladder for teachers. Changes in career opportunities for teachers may be possible, if proposals like those prepared in North Carolina by the Charlotte-Mecklenberg school district or in the state of Tennessee are widely adopted. Both proposals link evaluations of teaching practice to advancement and establish long-term opportunities for teachers. The Charlotte-Mecklenberg school district plan promotes continuing professional development and encourages outstanding performance by all teachers. This career structure proposes different levels of teachers. Beginning teachers would be "provisional teachers" who, after time, graduate to "career candidates," and then to "first-level," "second-level," and "third-level" career teachers. Evaluation and training would take place at all levels for all teachers. Tennessee's Master Teacher Proposal defines four levels of teachers: apprentice, professional, senior, and master. All teachers would have a five-year license at one of these levels. This master teacher program would institute a new pay system and, for certain levels, a longer contract year. Both proposals allow teachers to choose career paths and provide incentives for good teaching practices. (JMK)

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SP022714

This Issuegram was prepared on April 15, 1983, by Bob Palaich, political scientist, Education Governance Center. For more detail, call 303-830-3642.

41. Restructuring Careers in Teaching

The Issue

Education majors perform poorly on standardized tests of academic achievement, the most competent teachers are most likely to leave the profession within five years, college graduates trained to teach science and mathematics are taking jobs in business or industry instead of teaching. These well-publicized trends indicate some of the ways in which the appeal of teaching as a profession seems to be on the decline. One approach to raising the appeal of the profession ties diagnostic evaluations to promotions and creates a career ladder for teachers. This Issuegram describes two types of career ladders that have been proposed and outlines some advantages and disadvantages of career ladders in general.

Context

In recent years, ways to present information to students have changed, as new teaching tools like educational television, programmed learning and computers have become available. So have ways to adjust salaries and working conditions, as unionization has come to the teaching profession. But the structure of teaching as a career has remained essentially unchanged: the primary avenues of advancement for successful teachers have led out of the classroom.

Changes in career opportunities for teachers may be possible, though, if proposals like those prepared in North Carolina by the Charlotte-Mecklenberg school district or in the state of Tennessee are widely adopted. Both proposals link3 evaluations of teaching practice to advancement and establish long-term opportunities for teachers. That is, they formulate genuinely new structures for teaching careers where other plans simply add new features (e.g., pay incentives, multiple assignments, comprehensive evaluations, teacher exchange programs) to current structures.

An example of a plan that adds new features but does not create a new structure is the pay incentive plan adopted by the Houston Independent School District in 1979-80. The plan does provide additional pay to school teachers, for five specific reasons. For example, teachers of mathematics, science, bilingual education and special education (all areas in which Houston faced teacher shortages) are eligible for up to $2,000 in additional pay for the 1982-83 school year. Teachers may also earn additional pay if their attendance record is outstanding, if they teach in schools with educationally disadvantaged students, if they have successfully completed college courses in curriculum and instruction appropriate to current teaching assignments, or if their students score above expectations on standardized student achievement tests. But the plan does not actually restructure the teaching profession. First, professional educators do not agree that outstanding attendance, completion of college courses or changes in student achievement test scores are appropriate measures of good teaching. Second, the incentives, which are tied to accomplishments during a given school year, offer teachers short-term rewards rather than long-term career opportunities.

The Charlotte-Mecklenberg Proposal

In the fall of 1981 a committee was formed in the Charlotte-Mecklenberg school district to study the possibility of implementing a merit pay system in the district. After months of study, the committee had found no existing system of merit pay that would be appropriate in the Charlotte-Mecklenberg schools. It had also found more evidence of the harmful and disruptive effects of merit pay than of its positive effects. The committee therefore recommended the creation of a comprehensive system of incentives and evaluation that would restructure careers for teachers in the Charlotte-Mecklenberg schools. The new system, concluded the committee, should address two particular concerns. First, merit pay plans tend to punish

the many by rewarding the few. Second, the bases of merit pay rewards are often arbitrary. Its recommendation accepted, the committee was then charged to develop a plan that would promote continuing professional development and encourage outstanding performance by all teachers. The committee responded to that charge by preparing a proposal, which the school board is now considering.

The career structure proposed would establish several different levels of teachers. First-year teachers would be "provisional teachers." Provisional teachers would be evaluated, then either recommended for advancement to "career nominees" or continued as provisional teachers for a second year. After that year, however, the absence of a positive recommendation would result in termination. Provisional teachers would participate in special training programs designed to assure their awareness of ways to describe and analyze classroom events and to diagnose instructional problems. They would also be assigned to a career teacher who would serve as advisor and mentor. The same opportunities would be available to career nominees, although career-teacher advisors would be different during the second year.

By the third year, teachers could become "career candidates" -- that is, teachers in whom the school district system would be willing to make major investments and from whom much would be expected. During the third year the candidates would, for example, be expected to continue participating in special training seminars, undertake improvement-oriented research projects in their own classrooms and begin playing leadership roles in school problem-solving groups. The candidate year would also be a time for potential career teachers to decide if they want to remain in the profession.

The following year would be called the "intern year." Prospective career teachers would then be provided with training and experience to give them a systemwide view of the school district.

Teachers who successfully completed the intern year would become "career teachers." First-level career teachers would continue to teach in regular classrooms, but they would also be advisors and mentors for provisional teachers and assume responsibilities for leadership and program development. Second-level career teachers would be organizational troubleshooters who would solve instructional problems and help others solve them. Third-level career teachers would carry out many of the functions of curriculum specialists, area coordinating teachers and inservice specialists.

The study committee's proposal emphasizes the importance of evaluation and training at all levels. Evaluations "should be conducted in ways that emphasize the development of successful persons, rather than the weeding out of unsuccessful ones"; they should be conducted on a long-term basis and by a variety of individuals. Training should be work-related. It should support short-term improvement of performance as well as encourage excellence in the long run; it should not be simply the accumulation of more degrees, more credit hours, and more certificates.

The Tennessee Master Teacher Proposal

An interesting proposal that would restructure career opportunities for teachers somewhat differently has been developed in Tennessee. It originated with a legislative study committee, has received strong support from the governor, and is now before the legislature. The bill that the legislature is considering proposes a statewide plan but would not require school districts to participate.

The master teacher proposal defines four levels of teachers: apprentice teacher, professional teacher, senior teacher and master teacher. Each teacher would have a five-year license at one of these levels. That is, apprentice teachers must become professional teachers within five years or seek new careers, and professional, senior and master teachers must either renew their licences at the same level or move to a higher level every five years. A new master teacher certification commission composed of master teachers, other educators and lay people would observe all teachers in their classrooms and examine students' progress. The state board of education would base its recertification decisions on the commission's recommendations.

The master teacher program would institute a new pay system. Although apprentice and professional teachers would be paid exactly as teachers are paid today, senior teachers would receive 30% more pay than professional teachers and master teachers would receive 60% more. Senior teachers would have an 11-month contract, master teachers a 12-month contract. Sixty percent of all teachers with 8 or more years experience could be senior teachers under the state plan; master teachers would have at least 13 years of experience and accept significant additional responsibilities including the evaluation of other teachers' performance.

Unlike merit pay plans which generally link a teacher's pay in a particular year to the tested achievement of that year's students, the Tennessee master teacher proposal would reformulate the entire structure of teaching careers. It

would allow outstanding experienced teachers, judged primarily by fellow teachers, to move to higher professional levels and salary scales. Indicators of student performance would be only one part of a comprehensive system of professional assessments.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Since the Charlotte-Mecklenberg and Tennessee plans are still in proposal form, assessing their relative advantages and disadvantages would be premature. From a broader perspective, however, there seem to be some advantages and disadvantages that are common to these proposals and perhaps to others like them now being discussed and developed around the country.

One major advantage is that restructuring career opportunities for teachers provides a way to pay good teachers more money so they need not turn to administration, part-time employment or other professions. The new structures institutionalize the process of performance appraisal, which might make appraisals less threatening and lessen the sense of isolation classroom teachers sometimes feel. The structures allow teachers to choose career paths. They provide incentives for good teaching practices, and they may well foster innovation and cooperation among teachers. Better structures may make the teaching profession more attractive to potential new teachers and perhaps ultimately improve the public image of education.

But new structures will require new effort. Administrators and teachers will have to work hard and in good faith to make performance appraisals productive. Much work needs to be done to replace speculation with sensible criteria for evaluating good teachers and good teaching practices. Political relationships that have developed over time need redefining. Teachers need to learn from other teachers about education practice; teachers, administrators and school board members need to redefine their positions at the collective bargaining table; the role of teacher organizations in the political process needs to be rethought in light of the new opportunities open to teachers. Less a disadvantage than simply a question that needs to be answered is whether restructuring is more appropriate at the state level or at the local level. A final disadvantage is that new structures could require new money. This raises a familiar but nonetheless difficult question: Who pays?

What to Read

Department of Education. "Tennessee Master Teacher Program." Nashville, Tennessee, 1983.

Houston Independent School District. "Second Mile Plan -- Impact Study 1978-80, 1980-81." Houston, Texas: 1982.

Phillip Schlechty et al. "Recommendations for Improving the Career Opportunities of Teachers in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools: A Constructive Alternative to Merit Pay." Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, 1983.

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